



# PUBLIC NOTICE

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DA 15-167  
February 6, 2015

## **Wireless Telecommunications Bureau Reminds Users Regarding Rules Governing Land-Based Testing of Automatic Identification System (AIS) Equipment**

By this *Public Notice*, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (Bureau) clarifies the requirements for on-land testing of Automatic Identification System (AIS) equipment. VHF maritime Channels 87B (161.975 MHz) and 88B (162.025 MHz) are designated for AIS,<sup>1</sup> which is an international maritime navigation safety communications system adopted by the International Maritime Organization and Safety of Life at Sea Convention intended for collision avoidance, monitoring and tracking. In adopting rules for domestic AIS operation, the Commission recognized that AIS can benefit homeland security as well as safety of navigation.<sup>2</sup> Unauthorized AIS transmissions from land can potentially degrade the utility of AIS for maritime navigation and as a tool to detect and prevent waterborne threats to homeland security.

AIS transponders on vessels must be programmed with the vessel's Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number.<sup>3</sup> An MMSI number (also referred to simply as an MMSI) is a unique nine-digit number assigned to ship stations that use Digital Selective Calling or AIS equipment.<sup>4</sup> Among their other purposes, MMSIs are used by search and rescue authorities, including the United States Coast Guard, to identify vessels and to obtain important information regarding a vessel in distress. As required by treaty, the Commission assigns MMSIs to individually licensed vessels in accordance with International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Radio Regulations and periodically notifies the ITU of assignments made to vessels traveling or communicating internationally.<sup>5</sup> For vessels that are licensed by rule,<sup>6</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> See 47 C.F.R. §§ 2.106 n.US399, 80.371(c)(1)(i) n.3.

<sup>2</sup> See Amendment of the Commission's Rules Regarding Maritime Automatic Identification Systems, *Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making and Fourth Memorandum Opinion and Order*, WT Docket No. 04-344, 21 FCC Rcd 8892, 8893 ¶ 4 (2006); Amendment of the Commission's Rules Regarding Maritime Automatic Identification Systems, *Second Report and Order*, WT Docket No. 04-344, 23 FCC Rcd 13711, 13712 ¶¶ 1-2 (2008) (*AIS Second Report and Order*).

<sup>3</sup> See Wireless Telecommunications Bureau Reminds Mariners Regarding Correct Use of Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) Numbers, *Public Notice*, 27 FCC Rcd 15260 (WTB 2012).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> A ship station is licensed by rule, obviating the need to apply to the Commission for a separate license, if the ship station is not subject to the radio equipment carriage requirements of any statute, treaty, or agreement to which the United States is a signatory; does not travel to foreign ports; and does not make international communications. See 47 C.F.R. § 80.13(c).

Commission has designated four private registration agents to assign MMSIs: BoatUS, Sea Tow International, Inc., Shine Micro, Inc., and United States Power Squadrons, Inc.<sup>7</sup>

In 2008, the Commission noted that there could be some confusion as to what type of authorization is needed for on-land testing of AIS equipment, given that the Commission authorizes AIS transmissions only under ship station licenses.<sup>8</sup> The Commission clarified that maritime support stations are authorized to undertake on-land testing and installation of AIS equipment, and may transmit on AIS frequencies for that purpose on a secondary, non-interference basis to operational maritime communications.<sup>9</sup>

It has come to the Bureau's attention that on-land testing of AIS equipment still is frequently undertaken without proper authorization, often using an MMSI that has been fabricated by the testing entity (*e.g.*, 123456789) rather than an MMSI duly assigned by the Commission or by one of the private registration agents. We remind maintenance and repair shops and other entities that intend to test AIS equipment on land that they must obtain a maritime support station license to authorize any on-land test transmissions. To obtain such a license, the testing entity must file an application on FCC Form 601, and specify the station class code FCA. Applicants for a maritime support station license may obtain an MMSI for their on-land test transmissions by attaching a request for an MMSI as an exhibit to the application. Those with questions regarding the license application process may contact the Commission's Universal Licensing System Technical Support at (877) 480-3201, TTY (717) 338-2824.

The maritime support station may, for purposes of on-land testing of AIS equipment, use either the MMSI assigned to it or the MMSI assigned to the ship station with which the equipment is associated.<sup>10</sup> We emphasize that the use of fabricated MMSIs, which can undermine the integrity of AIS by engendering confusion as to who is transmitting the AIS signal and why, is prohibited.<sup>11</sup>

For further information, contact Jeff Tobias of the Mobility Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, at (202) 418-1617, TTY (202) 418-7233, or via email at [jeff.tobias@fcc.gov](mailto:jeff.tobias@fcc.gov).

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<sup>7</sup> Contact information for the four private registration agents can be found at [https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/DA-07-1732A1.pdf](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-07-1732A1.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See *AIS Second Report and Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 13727 n.114.

<sup>9</sup> See *id.* (citing 47 C.F.R. §§ 80.653(b)(2), 80.655(a)(2),(b)).

<sup>10</sup> Given that AIS equipment is typically designed so that the MMSI cannot be altered by the user using external controls, and that reprogramming an MMSI often has to be performed by or with the guidance of the equipment manufacturer or a dealer, it is not our intention to further restrict the flexibility of ship station licensees and testing shops in this regard, beyond prohibiting the use of a fabricated or otherwise inaccurate MMSI. The Commission may revisit the issue if experience suggests that this approach is problematic for any reason.

<sup>11</sup> See, *e.g.*, 47 C.F.R. § 80.231(b)(2) (prohibiting the knowing programming of inaccurate static data, including an inaccurate MMSI, in Class B AIS equipment); 33 C.F.R. § 164.46(i) (Coast Guard regulation providing that "[e]xcept for maritime support stations ... licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), broadcasts from AIS Class A or B devices on aircraft, non-self propelled vessels or from land are prohibited")